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# **‘Boys, when they do dance, they have to do football as well, for balance’: Young men’s construction of a sporting masculinity**

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## **Abstract**

The construction of masculinity and identity for young men is often complex. The role of sport for young men’s construction of a ‘valued’ masculine identity mirrors this complexity, and sport is often viewed as the paradigmatic space for displaying dominant forms of masculinity. This paper explores how young men construct their masculinity within the field of sport. Using Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field, capital and *illusio*, this paper draws on semi-structured interview data with 70 young people from 3 schools in North East England (33 young men/37 young women, aged 15–16 years). The key principle is that young men are able to manipulate and manage their sporting identities, whilst being mindful of how broader gendered expectations (‘etiquette’) can influence which gendered identities, sports and bodies are socially valued and rewarded. Young men expressed a strong desire to conform to broader social norms which equate sport with masculinity, thus reinforcing gender-appropriate sports as more acceptable. Young men are constantly undertaking ongoing identity work to present a version of masculinity that is context and field-specific. However, the physical use of the body in a sporting field remains a paradigmatic way in which masculinity is promoted and valued for young men.

## **Keywords**

Bourdieu, gender, habitus, masculinity, sport

As young men transition through adolescence, they begin to develop their adult identity which is formed as a result of experiment, uncertainty and tension (boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2008; Marcia, 1980). Sport is a historically gendered entity, based on an ideology of difference (Hargreaves, 1994; Katsarova, 2019; Liston, 2006). Historically,

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certain sports have been constructed as ‘male’, and female participation has been excluded. This assumed ‘natural’ nature of sport represents a site to demonstrate ‘value’ as a man, but also can represent a burden, increasing the social pressure for young men to meet societal expectations of ‘being male’. In sport, this ideology of difference has persisted in which male sport is often viewed as superior to female sport (Bruce, 2015; Hargreaves, 1994). The assumed naturalness of the male sporting body has therefore had profound effects on how sport is viewed as suitable, appropriate or valued within society. Whilst some progress has been made in relation to gender equality in sporting opportunities, funding and recognition (Katsarova, 2019), the role of sport in the construction of masculinity remains consistent. Society is more complex in relation to gender than previously, and there is thus a need to explore how gender is enacted in different ways in certain sports, and the impact this can have on young men navigating their sense of identity. This paper therefore explores how young men understand masculinity, enact their embodied gendered identities and can manipulate their outward identity whilst maintaining their sense of self.

The purpose of this paper is to explore young men’s experiences of sport and identity, documenting how wider societal gendered norms and stereotypes influence young men’s decisions with regard to their participation in sport. Through drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 70 young people, a key point emphasises that sport is not isolated from other social fields – young men are able to strategically manage and construct their gendered identities across different social fields to closely approximate dominant cultural ideals. This paper therefore builds on previous literature regarding masculinity in sport (e.g. Adams et al., 2010; Anderson, 2014; Thorpe, 2010) to demonstrate that the wider cultural assumptions that inextricably link football (soccer), prowess and masculinity are not always followed unquestioningly by young men. Instead, the role of agency and nuance is emphasised. Thus, within this paper, I draw upon Bourdieu’s sociological concepts of habitus, capital, field and *illusio* to consider how gendered ‘etiquette’ (framed in relation to desirable behaviours) is relevant to both the choice and uptake of different sports for young men. Using this Bourdieu-inspired theoretical framework, the significance of youth peer relationships and hierarchies can be acknowledged through the rewarding of socially valued masculinities. Thus, this paper offers a significant and original contribution to current knowledge by exploring the critical engagement that young men are able to enact in developing their own gendered identities. The nuance in relation to young men’s strategic manipulation of their gendered identity therefore offers an alternative reading of how young men can successfully navigate their masculinities during youth.

## Gender, identity and Bourdieu

Gender is often assumed to be a taken-for-granted social category, and thus ‘natural’ (Hargreaves, 1994; Skeggs, 2004). The assumed naturalness of gender poses problems for young men during the negotiation of their gendered identities. Bourdieu (2001) addressed the concept of gender in *Masculine Domination*. Within this, he argues that the differences between males and females are misrecognised, and, thus, their differences hold deep and powerful meanings for individuals and throughout society. This section

will briefly outline Bourdieu's first principles – habitus, field, capital, *illusio* and *doxa* – before evidencing the utility of using this framework to explore young men's experiences of masculinity and sport in this paper.

Bourdieu's seminal concept, the habitus, represents 'systems of transposable dispositions' (1990: 53) which operate at both a conscious and non-conscious level to influence people's practices and behaviours in relation to their underpinning beliefs and tastes (Adkins, 2003; lisahunter et al., 2015; Metcalfe, 2018; Thorpe, 2009). Historical structures of the masculine order are embodied in 'unconscious schemes of perception and appreciation' (Bourdieu, 2001: 5). The habitus therefore contributes to keeping the structure of gender classification alive (Krais, 2006; McNay, 1999), normalising expected behaviours of males and females. The habitus explains how individuals can come to embody gendered characteristics and learn the behaviours that are socially accepted of them within specific social fields (Thorpe, 2009). Bourdieu (2001) argues that the social order of gender encourages individuals to pursue practices appropriate to their sex whilst discouraging inappropriate behaviours. In relation to sport, this can equate to gender-appropriate sports: for UK men, culturally highly valued sports are football (soccer), rugby union and cricket (Bourdieu, 1978; Bramham, 2003; Hickey, 2008; Metcalfe, 2018). These choices are often assumed to be 'natural', and this is explained by the embodied habitus through the inherent relationship between gender and the functioning of the body (Gao, 2015; Thorpe, 2010).

The habitus has been critiqued for determinism (Jenkins, 1982; Yang, 2014), largely as a result of the constitutive role of previous experiences and socialisation informing the development of the habitus, and thus limiting subsequent opportunities that are available to an individual (Bourdieu, 1984; Reay, 2004; Wacquant, 1989). However, the normalisation of gender differences through the habitus is an accurate reflection of the deeply entrenched gendered nature of sport (Hargreaves, 1994; Laberge, 1995). Furthermore, an important justification for the choice of Bourdieu's concepts in this paper is that Bourdieu (2001) clearly articulates the relational aspect of gender between male and female, masculinity and femininity, a criticism that has been levied at other gender theories (Thorpe, 2010). Furthermore, Thorpe (2009: 499) writes that the embodied 'habitus . . . (has) the potential to help us to understand the ways in which embodied practices construct identity, difference and given social order', and thus the habitus is of critical importance here to understand how young men manipulate their masculinities in relation to their sporting endeavours.

Fields, as 'structured contexts' (McLeod, 2005: 14) with their own set of rules, and struggles over what is viewed as legitimate and valued, are the arenas in which the habitus is enacted and embodied (Bourdieu, 1985). Fields are the site of domination and subordination (lisahunter et al., 2015). Sport functions as a field and contains a struggle over the definition of legitimacy within the system of institutions, agents and individuals (Bourdieu, 1978). Gender links to fields because fields embody gender rules (Chambers, 2005), indicating which identities, bodies and practices are rewarded with more value, and therefore capital.

There are four types of capital which regulate an individual's position within their social field – economic, social, cultural and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001). The development of a gendered identity is closely linked to the accrual of capital. Social and symbolic capital can be awarded to those gendered identities that closely approximate the

dominant cultural (gendered) arbitrary, making traditional and stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity appear as legitimate (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Lawler, 2004). Specifically in relation to sport and gender, Bridges (2009: 84) developed the concept of gender capital as a combination of cultural capital and hegemonic masculinity: 'the value afforded to contextually relevant presentations of gendered selves'. This notion contributes to explaining how a hierarchy of sports underpinned by those deemed as gender-appropriate has come to permeate how young people identify which sports are most suitable for them.

Supporting concepts of *illusio* and *doxa* are also important to define. Linked to the concept of capital is *illusio*, 'the fact of being caught up in and by the game' (Bourdieu, 1998: 76). This refers to the belief that we have in 'maintaining *the game* or the social space and its outcomes' (Hunter, 2004: 178; original emphasis); thus, enacting dominant representations of masculinity and femininity indicates that an individual believes that the benefits of such behaviour are desirable (e.g. through accumulating social capital; Metcalfe, 2018). Abiding by the rules of gender, conforming to stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity, even within the field of sport, becomes important for young people who are seeking to establish their position within their social hierarchy (Read et al., 2011). *Doxa* refers to the 'familiar, unquestioning sense of knowledge and belonging within a particular social world' (Iisahunter et al., 2015: 16). It is through the *doxic* acceptance of gender norms within the *habitus* that the historical structures of the gender order are reproduced and have power (Bourdieu, 2001). Individuals are said to understand the code of gender, and thus have a *doxic* acceptance of the gender structure, helping to explain the stability of hierarchical gender relations built on patriarchy and relationships of domination/subordination.

Bourdieu's sociological concepts have been applied to gender and sport, despite the aforementioned criticisms of determinism (Laberge, 1995). Gorely et al.'s (2003) study of the *habitus* in physical education emphasises the importance of sporting bodies as representing a key site for the struggle over the boundaries of appropriate masculinities and femininities; and thus, those bodies that challenge gender norms are often stigmatised through links to (homo)sexuality (Laberge, 1995; Metcalfe, 2018). A key theme in Bourdieu's (2001) *Masculine Domination* is that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals are the main victims of the symbolic domination of masculinity and gender – and as such, the regulation of sporting male bodies to approximate idealised masculinity is critical to developing one's 'successful' identity. Thorpe's (2010) study of masculinities in the field of snowboarding highlighted how a feminist reading of Bourdieu's concepts 'may facilitate fresh insights into the multiplicity, dynamicism, and fluidity of masculinities and gender relations in contemporary sport and physical cultures' (177), and thus demonstrates the utility of using these concepts in this paper to explore how young men construct, reconstruct and manipulate their gendered identities within sporting fields.

## The present study

This paper draws on interview data collected within a broader study focusing on the complexities of how young people negotiate their gendered identities across different

fields including schooling, sport, media and physical culture. The young people interviewed attended three demographically different schools in North East England. The schools varied in ethos and student characteristics, measured using free school meal (FSM) data as a proxy for socio-economic status (David et al., 2001). School 1 is a comprehensive 11–16 state school in a working-class and deprived area, with a higher than average level of students receiving FSMs (national average 12.9%; school average 22.5%). School 2 is a nationally regarded high-achieving 11–18 comprehensive school with lower than average FSM data (8.1%). School 3 is a mixed independent (fee-paying) day and boarding school. All three schools are located within the same county and local educational authority. The different types of schools allow for an exploration of how gendered rules and expectations may vary between classed fields; Arnot (2002: 137) suggests that private schools ‘are likely to set up a different set of relations between male and female pupils than state schools’.

In each school, all Year 11 students (aged 15–16;  $n = 332$ ; average age 15.7 years) completed a questionnaire assessing each individual’s self-identified sex, level of participation in sport/physical activity, and their understanding of masculinity and femininity. Each participant was given the opportunity to be considered for interview. One hundred and seventeen young people identified a willingness to be interviewed, of whom 33 young men and 37 young women were selected. Those selected were chosen based on questionnaire responses to produce a varied sample in relation to their level of participation in sport/physical activity alongside their views of masculinity/femininity. Indicative of the local geographical area, interviewees were predominantly white ( $n = 67$ ; black  $n = 1$ ; Asian  $n = 2$ ). Within this paper, the views of both young men and young women are presented, and these are identified in relation to their school. I argue that it is important to include both young men and young women’s views on masculinity, as to reduce the experiences of masculinity only to males reinforces a reductionist and determinist reading of gender. Using schools as a measurement of one’s collective classed habitus illustrates how gendered differences may occur in relation to the school ‘field’ which young people inhabit.

The young people interviewed were offered the opportunity for this to be conducted either individually or with a friend (51% of interviews were conducted in pairs, 49% individually). When the interview was conducted with a pair, both participants’ responses were considered and analysed within the data collected. The interview schedule was semi-structured and covered issues of gender norms, individual gendered behaviours, sexuality, school hierarchies and popularity, along with specific questions relating to sporting behaviours and bodies. Interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes (average 46 minutes). All names used in this paper are pseudonyms allocated randomly during transcription. To avoid conflating gender with sex and reproducing a binary of gender, a visual aid was used which showed a scale ranging from ‘100% masculinity’ to ‘100% femininity’. This scale was used to encourage young people to consider the potential for gender identities to be fluid, dynamic and not automatically conflated with biological sex. There was a danger with this scale that a binary and oppositional way of thinking was encouraged; however, discussions demonstrated this aid was useful in encouraging the young people to reflect on the temporal nature of gender as produced in relation to the demands of specific fields.

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding (Aronson, 1995; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Following transcription, interview transcripts were read and initial codes relating to ideas around masculinity, identity, and agency emerged. Following subsequent re-readings, links were made between themes, to theory, and to coherently represent young people's experiences in a meaningful way. The themes presented in this paper are: etiquette, a winning masculinity, regulating masculinity, and maintaining/manipulating masculinity; all have origins in my original coding decisions, and document how masculinity is understood and enacted by these young people. Bourdieu refers to the concept of *illusio* as 'the fact of being caught up in and by the game' (1998: 76), and the following discussion explores key ideas in relation to a sporting game – the 'rules' (conceptualised as etiquette), that there must be a 'winner', and how the game is 'refereed' (conceptualised as regulating masculinity). The interviews suggested that engagement with norms of masculinity operates in an alignment with these principles of a game, and thus further evidences the utility of a Bourdieusian framework.

## Findings and discussion

The following sections provide an analysis of qualitative interviews, explaining how young people understand masculinity 'etiquette' – the rules and norms of masculinity which underpin how young men subsequently engage with sport and physical activity. These gender norms were ubiquitous, demonstrating the power of the gendered habitus to influence thoughts, actions and dispositions. The subsequent sections consider how young men could 'win' through their representation of masculinity, and how masculinity is regulated, before cumulating in the role of agency in how young men can maintain and manipulate their masculinity depending on the field in which they inhabit.

### *Gender 'etiquette': underpinning engagement with sport*

Across each of the three schools, the young men knew what a definition of masculinity meant for them, aligning with the 'original *illusio*, which is constitutive of masculinity' (Bourdieu, 2001: 74), meaning that these young men were enacting the games of masculine domination through their habitus. Rather than promoting a sense of gender fluidity and acceptance of 'different' gendered identities, many young people expressed that stereotypical and binary characteristics of masculinity and femininity were the 'norm', and these were often conflated with sex so that being masculine was expected of young men, and feminine was expected of young women. Thus, the gender etiquette – the unwritten rules of gender that dictate appropriate behaviours and identities – reinforced the gender binary and encouraged conformity: 'the popular girls are very girly girls and the popular boys all play football and they all put as much gel as possible in their hair. They're all very stereotypically male and female' (Sam, School 1). Expectations of stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity therefore became tacit knowledge within one's gendered habitus, contributing to a collective doxic acceptance of the gender structure (Bourdieu, 2001).



The gender 'etiquette' expressed by these young people functioned to regulate and reinforce stereotypical and binary manifestations of accepted gendered identities. Bourdieu (2001) highlights how masculinity is constructed in relation to a fear of the female and femininity. For these young men, distancing themselves from the perceived feminine 'other' was commonplace in how these young men understood and enacted their gendered identities (Laberge, 1995). Young men identified these pressures to conform and distance their self from possible homophobic criticism:

(Y)ou wanna act a specific way so you don't receive any criticism. As soon as someone doesn't act a specific way then the criticism, the name calling starts. Then you kind of refuse to act that way, (against gender 'rules') so you don't get hurt. (Gary, School 2)

(T)here's certain aspects of being feminine which aren't involved in the male, like probably like the high pitch of the voice and the way they walk, and speak differently that a male couldn't do, like they can still be feminine but there's different ways, but they'd be called gay. (Danny, School 1)

Respect for, and behaviour in accordance with, the gender 'etiquette' creates a form of gender hierarchy for young people (Arnot, 2002; Shakib, 2003). Social and symbolic capital is allocated to those who follow these 'rules' and embody culturally legitimated representations of masculinity. As such, these gendered identities hold greater capital, and are recognised as more powerful within the youth peer nexus. The successful enactment of masculinity 'rules' leads to a more stable gender binary, leaving the doxic gender order unchallenged. This therefore supports the concept of *illusio* in explaining young people's behaviour – the desire for social status emphasises how young people can become 'caught up in and by the game' (Bourdieu, 1998: 76), reinforcing the desire to align with the correct gender 'etiquette'.

Applying the gender 'etiquette' to the field of sport, these young men 'knew' the forms of masculinity and appropriate activities that were expected of them. An ideology of difference between men and women in the field of sport was reinforced through binary and derogatory assumptions, simultaneously re-emphasising the importance of sport for the presentation of masculinity. This aligns with Thorpe's (2010) conclusion that masculinity depends on proving oneself, and a key field for this is sport. For instance, Ricky (School 1) crudely summarises this distinction and how sport is integral to masculinity: 'The main competitions in life, males are more about sport, like stereotypically, and females are more about appearance, so that's their main competition. That's what you want to be winning at.' This quote emphasises how capital is intertwined with gendered identities – young men are able to accrue capital (and 'win') by participation in sport, capital which, in contrast, is not as readily available for young women.

### *'Winning' at gender in sport*

By aligning with the gender 'etiquette' and dominant representations of masculinity, young men were able to accrue social and symbolic capital. Popularity, achieved through social capital and associated status, has been a consistently important part of life for



young people (Metcalf, 2018; Read et al., 2011); thus the interplay between sport and capital reinforces appropriate behaviours. During a conversation with Greg (School 1), these ideas were clearly articulated:

Greg: (P)eople tend to say that if you're good at football you're quite popular . . . Because it makes you stand out from everyone else, and it's something that everyone thinks is cool, instead of being like good at dance, but people say football is like the male thing so people are like 'he must be hard' because of that.

Interviewer: Does sport come into being popular for girls?

Greg: Erm I think no, it's more about looks for girls, like if they want to be popular then they're stuck in having to look a certain way.

'Winning' at gender in sport is therefore based on an ideology of difference in which engaging in sport is encouraged (and rewarded) for young men, but symbolically othered for young women (Hargreaves, 1994; Waldron, 2016). This quotation also highlights a classed dimension to the role of sport in the construction of 'successful' masculine identities for young men: in this more working-class school environment, football (soccer) is a valorised activity, thus carrying greater possibility for social capital. Contrastingly, at School 3, the elite private school, rugby union unlocks social capital for young men:

(R)ugby is the only male sport (at this school) that really counts. But outside this school, my boyfriend, he doesn't go to a private school and his life revolves around football . . . because you don't find rugby at a state school. (Caroline, School 3)

For young men, therefore, participating in an 'appropriate' gendered sport reinforces the 'naturalness' of the male sporting body (Hargreaves, 1994), whilst simultaneously narrowing the accepted definition of masculinity. The development and regulation of gender-appropriate sports is also reinforced through the habitus-capital nexus, and emphasises the ideology of difference in how young people understand their gendered capabilities.

### *Regulation of gender-appropriate sports*

The broader 'etiquette' of gender operates within the more specialised field of sport to indicate which sports are considered 'appropriate' for young men. Within one's habitus, young men's possibilities for participation in sport remains a 'forced choice' (Bourdieu, 1984: 173), and these young men's experiences support Wacquant's (1989: 45) conclusion that '(w)e can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principles of these choices'. Aligning with the dominant sporting choice (which is also classed; Bourdieu, 1978) permits young men to capitalise on the accrual of social capital, which is subsequently consecrated as symbolic capital through peer acceptance. For instance, first XV rugby union players at School 3 'would literally be like the celebrities of the school' (Nate, School 3), and receive 'benefits' such

as being 'able to miss the lunch queue' (Ethan, School 3), leading to the conclusion that 'this school revolves around (boys') rugby' (Claire, School 3). The prioritisation of rugby is maintained by the othering of alternative sports, maintaining a hierarchy in which capital is proportionately allocated to those in sports that align with the dominant notions of masculinity and male prowess. An example of this regulation of male sporting choice is presented by Shaun (School 3), a nationally ranked table tennis player, yet

(my) friends tease me because I don't play rugby and instead I play table tennis, so that I might not be seen as physically hard as them, it's just jokes, but sometimes there is a tension about physical sports being more manly and less physical sports like tennis, table tennis or rowing being less manly.

The same sentiment was evident in relation to football at Schools 1 and 2, and the capital allocated to those associated with football and rugby further reinforces a narrow definition of what constitutes an accepted masculine identity for these young men. When asked about the consequences of young men participating in a non-gender-appropriate sport, the vast majority of responses, whilst personally suggesting that they would encourage it and that they 'should carry on', also indicated that 'boys all have to be seen to be manly, and they'd be called camp, and be stereotyped as being definitely gay and they'd be like "why's he doing dancing" and stuff like that' (Carly, School 1). This social denigration and homophobic assumption attached to participation in non-gender-appropriate sports further reinforces 'acceptable' behaviour and makes individuals less likely to challenge the taken-for-granted and doxic knowledge underpinning gender 'etiquette' and how it applies to sport.

The historical construction of masculinity as 'to be as a male, and therefore non-female' (Bourdieu, 2001: 23–24) was identified as a burden for these young men in challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of what constitutes gender-appropriate sports. In comparison to their female peers, these young men identified that the culturally valued definitions of masculinity were narrower than femininity, and therefore were more regulatory in influencing young men's sporting behaviours. For instance, interview excerpts suggest that

if girls do rugby, they are less likely to receive (negative) comments, because, a boy doing ballet would get more stick than a girl doing rugby. Maybe boys are harsher or they give more criticism about stuff like that, but they would say he was gay. (Stefan, School 2)

I have a friend and he does dancing for a theatre stage school and he got bullied when he was younger . . . I think the abuse was based on the fact that what he did was seen to be a feminine sport, and that made him homosexual, or at least implied that. (Connor, School 2)

For these young men, a 'forced choice' (Bourdieu, 1984: 173) exists in which participating in a 'safe' sport does not threaten the norms of the gendered habitus and risk losing social capital (and associated status/popularity). Young men's sporting participation appears to be tightly regulated through more extreme negative consequences for transgressing the gender 'etiquette'. For young men, the successful enactment of the gender

'etiquette' in sport promotes dominant representations of masculinity through gender-appropriate sports (rugby union and football), which further stabilises the gendered habitus and reduces possibilities of encouraging alternative masculinities in sport. The male sporting gender order remains unchallenged. When considering participation data from the broader study, Metcalfe and Lindsey (2019) highlight that young men participate in significantly more hours of sport and physical activity, but also show that when young women do participate, they are more likely to choose non-traditionally gender-appropriate sports than young men. This quantitative data therefore supports the assertion that young men face greater pressure to conform to culturally dominant representations of a narrow masculinity. Societal gender norms therefore place greater value on what is seen as masculine. Even though young women who engage in stereotypically masculine sports are still seen as transgressing dominant gender norms, they are at least engaging in sports which are deemed to be more culturally valued than stereotypically feminine ones. Thus, for these young men, maintaining a coherent and respected gendered sporting identity becomes increasingly important.

## **Maintenance and manipulation of gendered sporting identity**

As highlighted so far, these young men were acutely aware of the gender 'etiquette' and the expectations that apply to them. By knowing these 'rules', young men are able to manage their own identity construction. The choice of sport, and one's engagement (or lack of it), represent an indicator of one's proximity to socially constructed norms of legitimate versions of masculinity. Interestingly, these interviews with young men suggested that situations exist in which more 'masculine' sports are strategically used to cover for other 'deviant' behaviours – in this case, participation in non-gender-appropriate sports. I will now focus on one individual, Greg (School 1), who embodies this agency to manipulate his masculinity.

Greg was a very successful and nationally ranked competitive dancer, yet he identified that he also played football. In this instance, football – identified in this school as the pinnacle sport for the embodiment of masculinity – was used to negate the potentially damaging consequences of participation in dance to his gendered identity. Leah (School 1) speaks of Greg and demonstrates how young men can use sport to monitor their own masculinity and how they appear to others: 'some popular boys, like Greg, when they do dance, they have to do football as well, like kind of for balance, to balance themselves out'. The requirement for young men to offset potentially 'deviant' behaviour with stereotypically masculine actions is reinforced by Nate (School 3): 'If I were to stop playing rugby and do another sport like dance, my friends would encourage me to still do rugby.' These examples further emphasise the tight regulation of masculinity in sport, and illustrate the importance of accruing capital through traditionally 'male' sports (rugby/football) to offset other 'deviant' aspects of one's gendered self. Gender-appropriate sports therefore remain unchallenged as legitimate. Only when participation in non-gender-appropriate sports is accepted without the need 'for balance', will young men have more freedom within their gendered habitus to explore different masculinities and activities in a 'safe' environment.

So far, I have argued that these young men place strong emphasis on the importance of maintaining a coherent sporting masculine identity. In drawing on the way in which football was used to 'cover' for other identities, it suggests an implicit acceptance of the sporting 'etiquette' within the field of sport. However, the use of sport and the physical body was used by Greg in a more nuanced way, appreciative of the way in which the display of masculinity can differ between fields, depending on the context in which individuals find themselves (Thorpe, 2010). As Greg (School 1) outlines when questioned about his participation in both football and dance, 'like if I'm out at a party, then people will get all hyped up about it (dance) but then like you can't play football at a party, so it just depends on what situation you're in'. Being 'hyped up' is aligned with accruing social capital for Greg, and thus the value of capital also varies across fields. This therefore demonstrates that young men can have a critical understanding of their environment and the rules that regulate different fields, and are able to maximise certain aspects of their masculinity to 'succeed' across multiple fields.

This section has highlighted that these young men were aware of the gendered 'etiquette' and norms that applied to them; yet were able to construct their own identities in ways which both reinforced and challenged how sport is viewed within the gendered habitus. The assumed 'natural' link between masculinity, sport and the habitus meant that constructions of masculinity can be more tightly enforced, rigid and limiting for young men attempting to negotiate alternative or multiple masculinities.

## Conclusions

Masculine 'etiquette' operates within the field of sport to dictate appropriate behaviours and identities for young men. For the young men presented in this paper, participation in sport continues to be strongly gendered, whereby the taken-for-granted association between sporting prowess and masculinity is reproduced in, and through, the gendered habitus.

In the first half of the discussion I presented evidence as to how masculinities in sport operate through a 'game' analogy, whereby young men are complicit in adhering to the etiquette and 'rules' of masculinity. The 'game' analogy draws heavily on Bourdieu's concepts of *illusio* and the habitus, whereby individuals understand the code of gender and act accordingly (Bourdieu, 2001). In presenting young men's experiences of conforming to dominant notions of masculinity, it can be concluded that masculinity within the field of sport continues to be heavily regulated, through peer judgements and the questioning of dispositions that differ from the expected norm (supporting the argument of Laberge, 1995). Through the subsequent sections on 'winning' and regulating masculinity, the role of capital in reinforcing and stabilising dominant masculinities in the sporting field was explored. Through interviews with young people, this paper has demonstrated how young men present and manipulate their sporting masculinities in line with socially constructed gender norms (or 'etiquette'). The social and symbolic capital available for male sporting prowess (underpinned by a sporting masculinity) narrows the opportunities for young men to explore different sports; instead, the presence of football and rugby union for the young men in this sample dominates how sport is seen, played and rewarded. These sections show that through a traditional use of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital, young

men's presentation of masculinity is relatively 'straightforward' and logical through a reward system that is predicated on reproducing the cultural arbitrary.

In the second half of the discussion, I present a more nuanced reading of agency and individual capacity to tailor one's masculinity to specific contexts and fields. It is through knowing the 'rules' of different fields that individuals are able to 'succeed' in them. The key argument within this paper is that young men have the capacity to manipulate and manage their representation of masculinity, being mindful of the demands of the field. The case study example interrogated in this paper of Greg balancing dance with football within the sporting field, but also being mindful of the social value of dance in non-sport-specific fields (e.g. parties), illustrates how young men can demonstrate agency in choosing which aspects of their masculinity to promote or deflect. This finding aligns with that of Thorpe's (2010) study of masculinity in snowboarding, and emphasises the contextual need to understand the rules of the field when studying how masculinities are constructed.

The habitus, as a concept that operates at both a conscious and non-conscious level, helps to contextualise the tensions young men face when negotiating their own masculinities. It is the deliberation between conscious reflexivity, and the often non-conscious integration of knowledge of the 'rules' of specific fields within the habitus that allows nuance in representations of masculinity. These young men were acutely aware of the gendered 'etiquette' that broader societal norms expect of them. Playing 'the game' (Bourdieu, 2001), by controlling and manipulating one's masculine identity to match the demands of the field, allowed these young men to accrue social and symbolic capital, equated in young men's lives with social status and popularity. Young men have bought into this game, and thus Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* is a valuable theoretical tool for contextualising young men's behaviours. The doxic nature of gendered 'etiquette' and its presence in the field of sport remains concerning, for the traditional and hierarchical binary between males and females still remains unquestioned (Bourdieu, 2001; Metcalfe, 2018), and young people's actions further stabilise these gender norms. Based on the findings presented in this paper, there remains work required to break down the taken-for-granted link between certain sports (football/rugby) and masculinity; and to decouple non-gender-appropriate sports from homophobic epithets and assumptions.

Young men's experiences and representations of masculinity in the gendered field of sport do not happen in isolation – the development of popularity, social status and symbolic capital permeates much of how young men conduct themselves. Sport is therefore an extension and microcosm of the tensions of how gender is understood throughout young people's lives. As I have argued, sporting masculinities have different social value in different fields, and as such there is the capacity for young men to develop a critical nuance of how to present their masculinity in any given context. Nevertheless, sporting prowess and a physical use of the body is imperative to the desirable representations of masculinity evidenced in this paper through the experiences of these young men.

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